

Floor Consideration of the Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act

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Today we take the final step in adopting legislation to assure the continued satellite delivery of network TV programming to rural homes that cannot receive those programs over the air from a local TV station.

Over the past year the House and Senate Commerce and Judiciary Committees have closely cooperated in a bipartisan process to revise and modernize the law, and I want to thank the members of the four Committees and their staffs who have worked so diligently to achieve this success.

My major goal in reforming the Satellite Home Viewer Act has been to bring to all 210 local television markets across the nation what we call local-into-local television service through which local TV signals are transmitted by satellite to homes in the market where the TV stations are located.

With the passage of the bill now under consideration we will achieve that goal.

Today, 28 of the 210 local TV markets do not have local TV services delivered by satellite.

These are very rural markets, and most of them do not have a full complement of network affiliated local TV stations in the market.

We call these short markets because they are missing one or more of the major networks, NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox.

Until today their short market status has made it difficult for the major satellite carriers to profitably serve these 28 rural regions.

So they are currently without service.

That will soon change.

Last year I spoke to the Chief Executive Officer of EchoStar, also known as Dish Network, one of the two major providers of satellite based TV services.

I asked him if we could find a way for his company to serve the 28 rural markets that do not have local service today.

He responded that if we revise the law to enable Dish to import distant network signals from stations located outside these rural markets to the extent necessary to supply the network signals that are missing in the rural markets, Dish would commit to serve all 210 local TV markets with local TV service.

The legislation before the House today makes that key change. Its passage means that, in the near future, Echostar will begin serving the 28 rural markets that lack vital local TV signals today.

I want to commend the leadership of Dish Network for making this commitment.

Millions of homes in America's most rural regions will be the beneficiaries.

With special thanks to Chairman Conyers of the House Judiciary Committee with whom I have worked closely on this measure and with thanks to my friend and colleague, Mr. Stearns from Florida, ranking member on our Commerce Communications Subcommittee, I urge passage of this bill.

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